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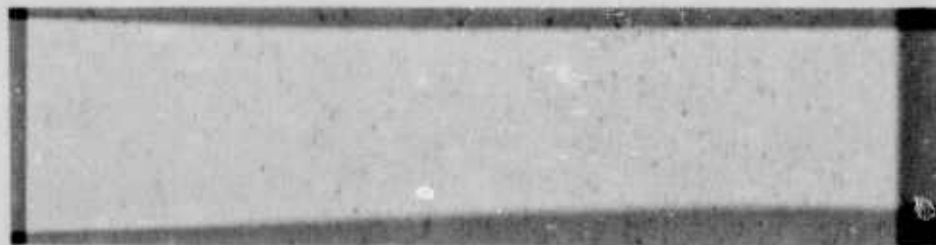
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A review of events leading to the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, focusing on factors which influenced the Soviet government's decision to use military force to resolve a growing political problem. The role of intelligence and security forces in reporting events taking place within Czechoslovakia is described as are the parts played by the Soviet military leadership and the various political positions and pressures exercised by the USSR's Warsaw Pact allies. Finally the decision itself is examined in terms of its timing and the known or suspected stands of the Politburo membership. NATO reactions to the events preceding invasion, and to the invasion itself are discussed. The paper asserts that intelligence and inept diplomacy provided Moscow with distorted information regarding events in Czechoslovakia, raising alarms that influenced the decision; that the Soviet military leaders preferred a political resolution of the Czechoslovak problem; that the Warsaw Pact allies were divided on the issue but that the conservative were more influential; and that the Politburo membership was divided and did not make its decision until some 10-15 days before invasion. With regard to NATO, its position was clearly and openly one of noninterference--expecting no threat from the action and avoiding all possible provocation of the USSR. The paper closes with a warning that this reaction to the Warsaw Pact's internal troubles, although correct in this instance, could be exploited by the USSR in a future situation, to mask a first strike against Western Europe.

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THE SOVIET DECISION TO INVADE CZECHOSLOVAKIA

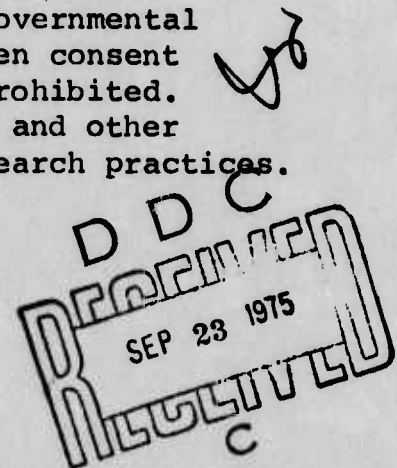
by

Robert M. Guth

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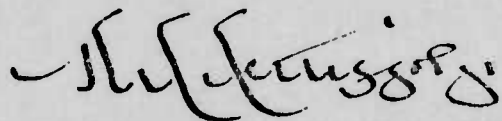
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Abstract of
THE SOVIET DECISION TO INVADE CZECHOSLOVAKIA

A review of events leading to the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, focusing on factors which influenced the Soviet government's decision to use military force to resolve a growing political problem. The role of intelligence and security forces in reporting events taking place within Czechoslovakia is described as are the parts played by the Soviet military leadership and the various political positions and pressures exercised by the USSR's Warsaw Pact allies. Finally the decision itself is examined in terms of its timing and the known or suspected stands of the Politburo membership. NATO reactions to the events preceding invasion, and to the invasion itself, are discussed. The paper asserts that intelligence and inept diplomacy provided Moscow with distorted information regarding events in Czechoslovakia, raising alarms that influenced the decision; that the Soviet military leaders preferred a political resolution of the Czechoslovak problem; that the Warsaw Pact allies were divided on the issue but that the conservatives were more influential; and that the Politburo membership was divided and did not make its decision until some 10-15 days before invasion. With regard to NATO, its position was clearly and openly one of noninterference--expecting no threat from the action and avoiding all possible provocation of the USSR. The paper closes with a warning that this reaction to the Warsaw Pact's internal troubles, although correct in this instance, could be exploited by the USSR in a future situation, to mask a first strike against Western Europe.

PRELUDE TO DECISION

Why did the Soviets invade Czechoslovakia in 1968? What drove them to set in motion the largest military force assembled in Europe since the end of World War II and to violate the frontier of a sovereign nation for the purpose of subduing an unresisting ally?

Consider some of the results of the invasion. Clearly the action was not a course that would make the Soviet Union popular throughout the world, and we may safely assume that among the possible motives the Soviets might have had in launching their operations an appeal to world opinion must have ranked last and least. In short order the world's communist parties with few exceptions found themselves in bitter opposition to Moscow--opposition which split almost the entire world communist movement and whose traces may still be found among splinter parties established after the invasion. Moreover, such an action seemed an anachronism, a relic of the cold war. This Soviet military move strengthened NATO's political support and increased NATO's military forces. It chilled Europe, both East and West, and suspended promising talks aimed at reducing tensions between the USSR and the United States. Indeed one could argue that in the tensions produced by the Czechoslovak invasion it was easily possible for the military of the United States to decide upon "mirv"-ing the warheads of nuclear missiles on land and at sea, a decision that was followed up by deployment beginning in 1970; from this decision came a new phase of the nuclear arms race that has unsettled all the nuclear arms calculations of the 1970's.

A great deal has been written about the antecedents of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and a great many theories have been developed concerning the decision to invade. Recently published statements by two of the principals involved on the Czechoslovak side--Dubcek and Smrkovsky--have rekindled interest in the subject. Official accounts by participating nations remain unconvincing, and no participant in the decision has come forth with more than a few specifics. As a result, theories on this subject are based on externals--on what in the legal world is called circumstantial evidence. All but the most superficial accounts agree that the decision was not a simple one, that pressures and counterpressures led to decisions and revisions, hesitations and mistakes.

Soviet apprehension regarding an invasion of Czechoslovakia was grounded in the history of relations between Germany and Russia. Czechoslovakia is centrally located in Europe; it lies athwart trade routes between eastern and western Europe and between Europe and the Balkans. This favorable economic situation has the drawback that Czechoslovakia occupies territory which has few natural features that would aid in the nation's defense. Attractive position and indefensible borders combine to make Czechoslovakia a seldom independent nation, a buffer between major powers, an invasion route, an area seen by the Soviets as a dagger pointed at the Russian heartland and by Germany as the westernmost territory reached during the penetration of the Slavs. There is little doubt that the Soviets viewed the political developments in Czechoslovakia in 1968 with alarm bordering on paranoia, conditioned by the "dagger" phobia and by memory of the two World Wars.

The precipitating political event--the Prague Spring--had come about without design or even identifiable leadership. This veritable revolt among the Czechoslovak communists was the natural reaction to a repressive regime headed by Antonin Novotny whose Stalinist government and unquestioning servility to Moscow, together with tolerance for a fair amount of corruption within his government, had brought serious economic troubles for the most highly industrialized nation in eastern Europe. Novotny's attacks on his critics--economists, writers, and intellectuals--did not help the situation, for all of these enemies were highly capable of expressing themselves. Coupled with discontent among the Slovak minority, these troubles led to a revolt against Novotny which reached its climax at the January 1968 plenum of the Czechoslovak Central Committee when Alexander Dubcek, a Slovak, was elected party secretary. The change was seen as no cause for alarm at the Kremlin, as Dubcek was an old associate of Brezhnev. According to one account, the two men had known each other when they were students in Moscow. The Soviet leader had spoken personally with Dubcek only a few weeks before the latter's elevation to the party secretaryship, when he was still First Secretary of the Slovak Communist Party. Novotny had invited Brezhnev to visit Czechoslovakia in December of 1967, in hope of receiving support in the face of increasing political opposition. Before returning to Moscow, Brezhnev had surprised Dubcek with a visit during which he took the measure of the young "fire-brand." When he left, Brezhnev abandoned Novotny, saying "Eto vashe delo" ("It is your affair.") and gave Dubcek de facto endorsement by doing nothing to interfere in the events which were taking place.¹ Dubcek of

course was no firebrand but a fairly unassuming and unimpressive if serious party functionary with a good record as a loyal communist party member, educated in the Soviet Union. William Shawcross' recent biography cites him as a man who had,

in the Kremlin's eyes, an almost perfect pedigree. Son of working-class parents, brought up and educated in the Soviet Union, loyal apparatchik, university in Moscow, a man whose regard for Russia had always been quite unconditional, who seemed, in many ways, more Russian than Czechoslovak--this was someone of whom the Kremlin need have no fear.²

That Brezhnev's assessment of the situation was faulty and the responsibility for succeeding events rests with him is historically accurate. But in light of liberalization measures taking place in Hungary and Rumania and in the Soviet Union and in light of Novotny's embarrassing record of poor judgment and mismanagement and Dubcek's "perfect pedigree," Brezhnev would have needed clairvoyance to be anything but pleased at the change taking place in one of his most loyal satellite states. What he saw at that stage was only a regime overtaken by history and collapsing from mismanagement and maladroitness leadership; a communist state whose evident economic distress was at best an embarrassment to communist economic doctrine and at worst a severe economic burden to the Soviet Union.³ In opposition stood a man with excellent political credentials, an economist whose loyalty to communism and the Soviet Union was manifest, backed by serious elements of the Czechoslovak political leadership, liberal and conservative. No clairvoyant, Brezhnev must have reported back that the change was just what Czechoslovakia needed. And, indeed, his judgment appeared sound and his assessments vindicated when the Prague

government invited him and other leaders of Warsaw Pact nations to participate in specially arranged February celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the Communist Party rule in Czechoslovakia. Among the celebrants were Brezhnev, Ceausescu of Rumania, Gomulka of Poland, Kadar of Hungary, Ulbricht of East Germany, and Zhivkov of Bulgaria as well as such senior Soviet functionaries as Peter Shelest, a member of the Politburo, and also K. F. Katushev and L. S. Kulichenko, both regional party leaders.⁴ What they heard there gave them pause. In his first major policy speech in the capital Dubcek promised reforms that would lead to widespread democratization. A large part of Dubcek's speech was significantly not quoted by Pravda, including the following: "At present, while retaining the essential centralism, we should lay the greatest accent on developing more, and above all deeper, democratic forms, and this not only in the upper Party echelons, but especially 'lower down,' in the organizations and among the membership." But Novotny was still President, and none of the standard purges which accompany major policy shifts had taken place.

Affairs then changed in Czechoslovakia, and Brezhnev found himself in a position where he believed he had to act. General Jan Sejna defected, senior military and security officials were ousted or resigned, and all were replaced by relatively liberal or politically uncommitted personnel. The government of this avowedly Soviet satellite was changing in ways that could lead into great trouble.

INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY

The reaction of Soviet security organs to the Prague Spring surely constituted an element fundamental to all considerations of the decision to invade. And here it is necessary at the outset to remark the peculiar nature of the Soviet and Czechoslovak security arrangements at the time of the governmental reforms inaugurated by Dubcek. The Soviet situation is perhaps easier to describe. The pernicious role of Soviet security organs in international relations has been the subject of a great many exposés. Their doctrinaire conservatism (by Soviet standards) has slowed or reversed liberal movements in Soviet-dominated nations and in the Soviet Union itself. Soviet security, as is well known, had undergone changes in the years after Stalin. The Soviet Union's principal security organization, the MVD/MGB (Ministry of Interior/Ministry of State Security), was renamed the KGB or Committee of State Security and reduced in rank from ministerial level and reshaped to accept Premier Nikita Khrushchev's liberalized views of government, reflecting the political reality that authoritarian governments which slacken controls must first neutralize their security forces. Stalin's security chief, Beria, found himself deposed, condemned and executed within a few months of Stalin's death. By Khrushchev's own account his execution was personally handled by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Malenkov, assisted by Mikoyan and several Soviet marshals, a procedure which casts some doubt on the juridical aspects of Beria's condemnation.⁵

Less well known, though well documented, is the special influence cast by Soviet security organs on their counterparts in satellite nations. Not only do the satellite services mirror those of the Soviet Union structurally, but they are laced with Soviet advisers at every operational and staff level, at home and at diplomatic outposts abroad.⁶ While this arrangement is not unique to the security services--it is equally prevalent in the armed forces and in the party--it is here that Soviet influence is at its height, since the power of the security service under the Soviet system pervades the entire nation.

Czechoslovakia in the late 60s under Novotny was a model state from the point of view of Soviet security. Led by a conservative premier, one of a diminishing number of Stalinists left in leadership positions, the regime in Prague guaranteed Czech loyalty. Statni Tajna Bezpecnost, the STB (State Secret Security), which is the Czech foreign intelligence service, had demonstrated remarkable aptitude and zeal and had an enviable record of successes in its twenty years of existence. It had become the principal ally of the Soviet Union in foreign intelligence--particularly in the fields of collection and deception. Soviet advisers assigned to Czechoslovakia had reason to congratulate themselves. They not only experienced the relative comforts of life in Czechoslovakia but could count on substantial contributions from Czech operations for Moscow, contributions made largely at Czech expense and often not particularly useful to Prague.⁷ Foreign intelligence (except for military intelligence) being largely in support of foreign policy, it is of little use to a nation whose foreign policy is imposed by Moscow. Truly trustworthy

and complaisant allies, the Czechs. Subordination of the Czechoslovak and other satellite security organs to the KGB had been accomplished under the banner of cooperation of international communism under leadership of the Soviet Union, an arrangement which was not seriously questioned until the Prague Spring.⁸ In retrospect the arrangement may be viewed as a forerunner of the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Soviet advisers served a double purpose in Czechoslovakia, as they do wherever they are posted. The first was to insure that operations of interest to the Soviet Union were mounted and that the material collected became available to Moscow. The second and more important was to keep a finger on the pulse of the host nation itself (a sort of political DEW line), watching for signs of unorthodoxy in the host's security and armed forces, that is, in the two elements which in Soviet eyes possess the forces necessary to insure stability of the political state. In the words of Lenin,

The scientific concept of dictatorship means neither more nor less than unlimited power resting directly on force, not limited by anything, nor restrained by any laws or any absolute rules. Nothing else but that.⁹

More to the point, a recent writer, in his opening chapter on the KGB, appropriately entitled "Instruments of Power," has remarked that

While ideas of freedom cumulatively are dangerous to the dictatorship, the guns of the Soviet military, if ever misdirected, could be immediately fatal. The military does possess the physical wherewithal to depose the oligarchy and wrest control of the country. So it is the military that the KGB watches most of all . . . the entire Soviet armed forces are honeycombed with KGB spies who continuously provide the Party with an ideological appraisal of individual officers as well as a political evaluation of individual units.¹⁰

It is not particularly surprising, therefore, to find intelligence deeply involved in the events which led to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Consider the curious case of General Sejna, the man who precipitated the fall of Novotny and set in motion a series of events in intelligence and security circles which culminated in the August invasion--the man who, in Aristotelian terms, could be viewed as the material cause of the invasion. The first public notice he received appeared in the New York Times datelined Prague, March 2, 1968, and headlined, "General Accused of Theft Flees From Czechoslovakia."¹¹ The brief story was that "Czechoslovakia's military prosecutor said today that Maj. Gen. Jan Sejna, wanted on charges of 'large-scale machinations with grass seed,' had fled the country." Subsequently it appeared that Sejna had fled through Yugoslavia to the West, and had requested and received approval for permanent residence in the United States. He was accompanied by his son and girl friend, leaving his wife in Prague to report his disappearance to the newspapers and giving his defection more the air of escapade than escape.¹² The 22-year-old girl friend was described by the State Department as the son's fiancée and by the Czechs as the General's girl friend.¹³ The wife's plight as well as her comments to the press tended to make the State Department's claim suspect or the young lady's position ambivalent.

But who was General Sejna, and why did his disappearance cause such a stir? Surely his grass seed manipulations would not have caused Marshal Ivan I. Yakubovsky, the Soviet commander of all Warsaw Pact forces, to make a hurried trip to Prague to "learn the extent of damage

to Communist-bloc security."¹⁴ Part of the answer was that Sejna, as a Major General in the Czech Army, was in a position to provide Western intelligence with considerable information concerning Czechoslovak and Warsaw Pact forces and plans. But why the arrests and suicides which followed and the wholesale reorganization of the security section of the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior? Major General Jan Sejna, forty years old at the time of his defection, was a "political general," a senior communist party official assigned to the military and given a military rank to perform his assignment--security.¹⁵ He was a friend of the Novotny family and a close friend of the President's 37-year-old son, Antonin Novotny, Jr. As secretary of the Party Committee in the Ministry of Defense, Sejna worked for Miroslav Mamula, the head of the Central Committee's Department of State Administration, a euphemism for Czechoslovakia's security organization.¹⁶ It was Mamula who was the first senior official ousted by Dubcek after election as First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee.¹⁷ On the military side, Sejna had worked for Colonel General Valdimir Janko, a Deputy to the Defense Minister, General Bohumir Lomsky. Sejna was a member of Parliament.

In the unprecedented climate of the Prague Spring questions arose in Parliament and in the press, with the result that the Sejna story became public very quickly. When it was all out, Sejna stood accused of masterminding a military putsch to restore Novotny's power. The plan, which he is accused of having actually set in motion, was developed with the approval of Mamula and implemented by Sejna together with Deputy

Defense Minister Janko. As a result, in mid-December 1967, Czech armored units were moving toward Prague and Bratislava. They were stopped by order of Dubcek upon learning of the moves from General Vaclav Prchlik, who was then head of the Army's Military Political Administration and who was instrumental in arranging their return to base without incident.

Named to investigate the Sejna affair was General Prchlik who in January 1968 had been appointed Mamula's successor as head of the Central Committee's Department of State Administration.¹⁸ As the investigation proceeded, a scandal unfolded which led to the suicide of General Janko, dismissals of the Minister of the Interior and the Attorney General, and resignations of a Deputy Premier, two Central Committee secretaries, and the Defense Minister.¹⁹ Finally, on the twenty-first of March, less than three weeks after Sejna's flight became known, President Novotny himself, in response to intense pressure and apparently having abandoned hope for support and intervention from the Soviet Union, resigned.²⁰

The after-effects of the Sejna affair went further. One theory holds that Marshal Yakubovsky's hurried visit to Prague on February 28 served a dual purpose--to consult urgently with Czech political and military officials regarding the security implications of Sejna's defection and to examine the feasibility of military intervention in Czechoslovakia.²¹ This view is based on retrospective estimates made by Czechoslovak intelligence officers and by the Czechoslovak Defense Minister, General Martin Dzur, that six months were needed to develop the necessary plans for the August invasion.²² Whether or not this was the case and whether, if so, Yakubovsky was acting from personal motives, for the Soviet military, or

for the Soviet government, remains a puzzle. At least one commentator, however, has marked the Yakubovsky visit as the beginning of Soviet military pressure for action against Czechoslovakia:

Within a couple of days of General Sejna's flight, Marshal Ivan Yakubovsky, commander-in-chief of the forces of the Warsaw Pact organization, arrived in Prague. It was no ceremonial visit. The marshal went straight to see Mr. Dubcek, Mr. Novotny, who was then still President of the country, and Mr. Josef Lenart, who was still Prime Minister. Though little is known about what passed between the Russian marshal and the Czechoslovak leaders on that occasion, there is every reason to believe that it marked the beginning of the long campaign of pressure by the Russian military to restore their control of Czechoslovak territory. It was nearly six months later before the campaign succeeded, with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by troops of the Warsaw Pact.²³

The Prague housecleaning which began with the ouster of Mamula continued through the spring and summer and resulted in removal of some 150 Czechoslovak nationals who worked directly for Soviet advisers in the Ministry of the Interior. Care was taken not to interrupt the flow of intelligence made available to the Soviets, but merely to isolate the advisers from their Czech contacts. At the same time a large number of Czechoslovak officers with known conservative leanings were ousted from higher commands. The merit system, which excluded party membership or loyalty to the Soviet Union as requisites for promotion to high positions, was strengthened.²⁴

The result of these changes following the defection of Sejna was that the Soviet military lost its eyes in Czechoslovakia and, worse, lost its influence in the selection of senior military leaders. This was

tantamount to shifting the Czechoslovak army from its previous position as the most reliable element in the Warsaw Pact to the least reliable.

Soviet failure to foresee that Czechoslovakia would become a problem is also reflected in their choice of ambassador to Prague. Stepan V. Chervonenko had been his country's representative in Peking from 1959 to 1962, where his activities had failed to bridge the rapidly widening gulf between the two nations. His recall in 1962 and assignment to Prague, a no-problems ally, was a demotion which may be directly related to the degree of confidence the Kremlin had in his competence. His reports home during the crisis may well have reflected his insecurity and general incompetence.

The effective loss of contact in the security field must have resulted in both alarmist reporting by the advisers and severe distortions in the perspective with which the Soviet political and security leadership viewed developments in Czechoslovakia. At a seminar on the Czechoslovak reform movement held at the University of Reading in 1971, Pavel Tigrid, the Paris-based Czechoslovak emigre journalist and publisher, pointed out that

the Soviets used to get accurate information from Czechoslovakia when Soviet liaison officers were directly connected with the Ministry of the Interior, the security apparat and the army, and . . . they lost this control with the personnel changes and simply did not have adequate information on what was going on.²⁵

According to a former Czechoslovak intelligence official who was there at the time, the advisers replaced their sources with new ones, hastily recruited and unvetted, selected from the ousted ultraconservatives who, of course, had a built-in bias.²⁶ The official pointed out that

discussions had begun regarding the proper role of Czechoslovak intelligence, with strong indications that the service would be reduced in size and limited to collection of information of interest to Czechoslovakia. This prospect, too, must have added to the Soviet advisers' discomfort.

In looking into the peculiar climate of Soviet and Czechoslovak security at the time of the Prague Spring and the possible reason or reasons for the invasion of Czechoslovakia by forces of the Warsaw Pact, there is yet another theory of why the Russians acted--a theory so bizarre and Byzantine that at first blush it sounds almost unreasonable, and yet, given the long history of intrigue within the Soviet government and without, the machinations by which Soviet decisions sometimes are reached, it is possibly true. The veteran writer on Soviet affairs, Isaac Don Levine, sometimes criticized for his unusual views, may just possibly be right in suggesting a stratagem against the Prague Spring that was outlined to him by a former Czechoslovak intelligence officer. The Levine suggestion is known as the Tukhachevsky Theory--referring, of course, to a well-known maneuver by German intelligence in the latter 1930's. The downfall and execution of the Soviet Deputy People's Commissar of Defense, Marshal Tukhachevsky, in 1937, was

caused by the discovery of treasonable correspondence between Tukhachevsky and high-ranking German officers. The correspondence was actually manufactured by German intelligence and placed to be found by known Soviet espionage agents. Stalin used the opportunity to execute a large number of high-ranking Soviet officers with Tukhachevsky and to initiate a purge which is estimated to have reached more than 30,000 Red Army officers; in consequence, the Red Army was seriously hampered in leadership during World War II.²⁷

In regard to the Prague Spring the Tukhachevsky Theory connects the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 with a curious rash of arrests, defections, and violent deaths of a number of high-level NATO officials, most of them West Germans.²⁸ The suggestion is that these people were agents of the KGB who were ordered to fabricate alarming information concerning the situation in Czechoslovakia. The information was then used by the KGB to influence Politburo moderates toward support of the decision to invade. Clearly a gambit of the more conservative elements of the communist movement at home and abroad, the scheme could have been arranged by Walter Ulbricht, the most conservative of the Warsaw Pact leaders and the most conspiratorial in style. More likely it would have been executed by the allies of the conservative leadership within the Soviet government--the KGB--whose Department D, the active and successful Disinformation Department, was thoroughly familiar with this type of operation.

There are three levels, then, at which the conservative communist leadership allied with the security organs may have contributed to the climate which led to the Soviet decision to invade Czechoslovakia: first, by providing the Soviet military in the form of Marshal Yakubovsky with the first clear evidence that the pace of change in Czechoslovakia was rapid and inimical to the interests of the Soviet armed forces; second, by creating a situation among Soviet military and security advisers which led to the distortion of news from Czechoslovakia; and, finally, the Tukhachevsky Theory--fanciful and conjectural, perhaps, but not impossible in light of its predecessor in the thirties.

THE SOVIET MARSHALS

That the Soviet military, as well as Soviet Security, was concerned and active during the Prague Spring is now clear. Czechoslovakia, militarily speaking, was far too valuable a prize to allow it to slip from under the Iron Curtain, to pass into (to change the figure of speech) the Western camp. Russia, and most particularly Soviet Russia, has had good reason to heed Bismarck's words at the time he was negotiating the Austro-German Treaty of 1879: "He who rules Bohemia rules Europe." Certainly control of Czechoslovakia gave the Soviet Union control of Eastern Europe. Had it not been for the strong NATO military alliance in Western Europe, supported by overseas strength beyond Bismarck's imagination, and weapons able to bypass the heart of Europe, the USSR after the Second World War would undoubtedly have controlled Western Europe as well. Small wonder that the Soviet military was much concerned with events in Czechoslovakia in 1968. To the Soviets a friendly Czechoslovakia not only meant an ally with respectable and loyal armed forces, but more than five hundred miles of territory in which to resist the specter of the hostile Hun--any possible military threat from West Germany. Czechoslovakia, both territorially and militarily, was an essential link in Warsaw Pact defenses, a fact illustrated by the frequency of military maneuvers in which Czechoslovakia was involved.²⁹ Together with East Germany and Poland, Czechoslovakia formed the so-called Iron Triangle or Northern Tier, whose importance to the Soviets was underlined by the large amount of military equipment given those three nations as compared to the Balkan group or

Southern Tier. An authority on Soviet foreign policy compared Rumanian and Czechoslovak liberalism and pointed to the

great strategic difference in the location of Romania and Czechoslovakia. Romania is practically surrounded by the Soviet Union and its allies. Czechoslovakia is a direct neighbor of the FRG, Federal Republic of Germany and Austria and is a vital link in the Soviet military and political system. What Moscow could tolerate regarding Bucharest, it could not in the case of Prague.³⁰

New weapons were usually introduced in the north, troop reductions permitted only in the south. The bulk of Soviet fighting forces outside the Soviet Union were stationed in Poland and East Germany. Given the Soviet fears of German "revanchism," and simple geography, the Northern Tier clearly had to be the critical portion of the Warsaw Pact. The three countries have long been referred to as the Warsaw Pact's "first strategic echelon." Paul Shirk in an article on the Warsaw Treaty Organization has described Czechoslovakia's important position:

The concept of Czechoslovakia being in the 'first strategic echelon' has both geographical and force value components. The former played a major role in the decision to invade. The acting Foreign Minister of Poland emphasized this point in September: 'When Czechoslovakia showed signs of leaving the Warsaw Pact, it endangered the balance of Europe. Czechoslovakia is a long finger reaching 600 miles right into the heart of Europe, pointed at the frontier of Russia. It . . . cuts the Socialist world in two. We cannot permit the Socialist world to be divided.'³¹

Marshal Yakubovsky, Commander in Chief of Warsaw Pact forces, must have been alarmed at the Czechoslovak situation in 1968. When he came to Prague to explore the security repercussions of General Sejna's defection to the West he found not only the problems created by the presumed compromise of key Czechoslovak and Warsaw Pact secrets to Western

intelligence but a situation in which top military and security leaders, known and trusted by their Soviet associates and counterparts, were being replaced with known liberals or politically untested unknowns. At the time the youngest marshal in the Soviet Union, Yakubovsky had been appointed in 1967 to his dual posts as First USSR Deputy Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Warsaw Pact states. He was a member of the dominant group of military leaders, the Stalingrad Group, which under leadership of the Soviet Defense Minister, Marshal Andrei Grechko, had advocated and obtained a shift in military policy, returning to conventional forces some of the stature lost to nuclear forces under Khrushchev.³² With his strong views on the importance of conventional forces and in his position as Commander in Chief of Warsaw Pact forces, Yakubovsky naturally would have been concerned over what he saw in Prague during his February visit and would have transmitted his concern to Grechko, his chief and mentor. It would have been natural for the latter to initiate contingency planning for a military invasion of Czechoslovakia. These conjectures are supported by the estimates made after the invasion that staff contingency planning and preparation for movement of an invasion force of the size used must have taken six months.

That the Soviet military was concerned early in 1968 became clear during the succeeding months in a number of ways. Within a few weeks of the Sejna defection the Soviet military revealed their keen interest in events in Czechoslovakia when

Oldrich Cernik, soon to be the Prime Minister, and General Pepich led a delegation to Moscow, where it was the military leaders--Marshal Grechko, the Defense Minister, and Marshals

Yakubovsky and Zakharov--who dealt with them. A terse communique said only that the Czechoslovak delegates had 'replied to a series of questions concerning the process of democratization in Czechoslovakia which are of interest to the Soviet side.' The Russian military could not have said more clearly that they were very worried by what was going on in Prague.³³

Their worry and probably their prophylactic preparation continued through the remainder of March and April, when events in Prague must have helped to confirm their fears. On March 22, Novotny resigned his last official post; the following week unheard-of student political demonstrations took place in Prague; on April 9 the Czechoslovak Communist Party published its Action Program entitled "The Czechoslovak Road to Socialism," a program described by a Western authority as "a remarkable contribution, the most liberal, comprehensive statement of policy ever issued by a ruling Communist Party allied with Moscow."³⁴ This program promised a new constitution, freedom of speech, assembly, press and religion; some liberalization of electoral procedures, including legal status for non-Communist political parties; governmental reforms in the judiciary-legislative-executive branches at expense of Communist Party control; and federation for Slovakia. In short, a radical departure from communist practice--heresy as seen from Moscow.

The high command of the Soviet military seemed bent on some sort of military solution to the Prague Spring, if in retrospect one read closely between the lines of what was happening. An ominous sign of military concern had been noted in the Western press at the end of March, although it dated back almost a month: military forces in the Carpathian district were put on alert status.³⁵ The district includes the area of the Soviet

Union directly east of Czechoslovakia. This was followed, towards the middle of April, by an alarming statement by General Aleksey Alekseevich Yepishev, head of the Central Political Administration of the Soviet armed forces, who was widely reported as having said that if a group of loyal Czechoslovak Communists appealed for intervention to the Soviet Union and to other socialist nations, the Soviet armed forces were ready to "do their duty."³⁶ General Yepishev half denied having said this in what must have been an unprecedented situation for a senior Soviet military officer, perhaps symbolic of the confrontation between the Soviet Union and "communism with a human face." As a member of Marshal Grechko's entourage, General Yepishev arrived in Prague in mid-May and was confronted by a Czechoslovak lady journalist described as "a fashionably turned out brunette in a powder-blue suit." This enterprising lady reportedly thrust a microphone in General Yepishev's face and asked the unaskable. The general's careful response: "This is a stupid thing."³⁷ Some theorists have ascribed the fateful decision to invade to that April meeting of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party at which Yepishev made his assertion, later denied.³⁸

Whatever the truth of the matter, shortly thereafter Soviet pressures to permit stationing of troops in Czechoslovak territory became intense to the point where Dubcek had to agree to permit maneuvers on Czechoslovak soil as the lesser of two evils. Protestations by Defense Minister General Dzur that these were long-scheduled and purely staff or communications exercises were contradicted by the sudden arrival in Prague of Grechko with a large party of Red Army generals and marshals. Not long after

their departure on May 22, well before the announced dates for the exercises, June 20-30, Soviet, Polish, East German and Hungarian troops were crossing the Czechoslovak borders in sizable numbers. In command was the Commander in Chief of Warsaw Pact forces, Yakubovsky. He evidently had difficulty including the Czechoslovak military forces in the "joint military exercises." According to one later commentator, "Czechoslovak officers were not told what was going on, Czechoslovak journalists were not admitted to press conferences and even the Prime Minister, Mr. Cernik, was told he could contact Yakubovsky only through Moscow.³⁹ In fact, Czechoslovak officials never learned how many troops were in their country or exactly what was their disposition. Well after the official closing date for the Warsaw Pact maneuvers, reports of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia were so frequent that Dubcek refused to meet with Soviet leaders in late July until the troops had all cleared out.

The USSR's full withdrawal, accomplished at a snail's pace, tends to refute the notion that the decision to invade had already been made, since the numbers of troops in Czechoslovakia in June would have been adequate to hold the country until additional forces were brought in. It is generally accepted that their presence was a threat and a form of pressure and at the same time that it served as a rehearsal and as a cover for the subsequent invasion.⁴⁰ The inference is that the military either would not or could not make the decision to invade (or turn the maneuvering troops into an invasion force)--that, without discounting military influences, the ultimate decision had to be made by a political body. Nevertheless troops of the neighboring Warsaw Pact nations were

on maneuvers of unprecedented size, beginning as early as May and ending with the invasion itself.⁴¹ The Soviets activated reserves in large numbers.⁴² High Soviet military figures were on incessant visits to the Warsaw Pact countries and in and out of Czechoslovakia more often than would seem warranted by a communications exercise. Yakubovsky was in the country at least half a dozen times in May and June, closely followed by the Soviet Defense Minister, Grechko, who was in Czechoslovakia five times in May alone, and by Marshal Yepishev, chief of the Soviet armed forces' political administration, who managed four trips in May.

In another context, but with familiar players, the Albanian government colorfully described the implications of such comings and goings, as well as of the maneuvers:

What other meaning can the Warsaw Treaty large-scale military maneuvers, which are now taking place in some of the satellite countries, have than to intimidate and recall to them that they must submit to the domination of the Soviet revisionists? Marshal Yakubovsky very frequently visits the capitals of the Warsaw Treaty Countries. But the presence of this revisionist raven, wherever it has appeared, has been of a quite ill omen

This Warsaw Treaty commander has become a roving war-monger who is being discredited: he has become a ridiculous "bugbear," going here and there to the countries where the heel of the Soviet revisionists is dominating, to threaten militarily, to occupy, to prepare military-political coups, to exert economic pressures, to get concessions for the Kremlin ruling clique.

Yakubovsky goes from Poland to Hungary, from Hungary to Bulgaria, from Bulgaria to Czechoslovakia, from Czechoslovakia to Rumania and vice versa, he inspects the Soviet occupation forces, he organizes Soviet espionage among the ranks of the officers of the "allied" armies, controls the political situation in every satellite country

The policy of military blackmail by the Soviet revisionists is not implemented only in the fold of the Warsaw Pack," and it is not only the "bugbear" Yakubovsky who wanders in Europe. There is also the "bugbear" Grechko who

as Minister for Defense of the Soviet Union travels with tanks, and with military plans in his satchel, to Cairo, Beirut, Algiers, Damascus, Iraq, Pakistan, and of late to India. All these movements of his reflect the military aggressive aims of the Kremlin revisionists . . . and the preparation of aggression against the People's Republic of China.

What conclusions may one draw about the part of the Soviet marshals in the decision of the Warsaw Pact--that is, of course, the decision of the Soviet Union--to invade Czechoslovakia? It is reasonably certain, an observer now can say, that the increasing size of the maneuvers and the visiting by high-ranking Soviet military officers was intended to bring pressure on the Czechoslovak political leadership. That the Soviet military leadership considered the Czechoslovak political situation a threat to the stability of the Warsaw Pact from a military standpoint is a fair assumption-- this despite protestations by Czechoslovak leaders that there was no intent to alter Czechoslovakia's role in the military alliance.⁴³ That the Soviet military leaders therefore wished to see a reversal of liberalization in Prague is also reasonable; but it does not follow that they advocated or even favored military intervention in the form of an invasion. Sensitive to the after-effects of the invasion of Hungary in 1956, Red Army leaders in 1968 are believed to have sought their ends by political means. A second and perhaps more significant reason is that some of the Soviet military may have seen a politically liberal Czechoslovakia with an army loyal to the Warsaw Pact as preferable to a subjugated Czechoslovakia in which the Soviet Army would have to cover the frontier between Czechoslovakia and NATO. This theme is reflected in the writings of one of the key authorities who states that

there is some evidence that important elements among the Soviet military were among those opposing the invasion, in the belief that Czechoslovakia was a more loyal link in the Warsaw Pact under Svoboda and Dubcek than she would be after an invasion.⁴⁴

Thus while the Soviet military were in every sense prepared to invade Czechoslovakia, the decision to do so probably was not theirs, nor did they form a group anxious for military action.

THE WARSAW PACT ALLIES

While military preparations leading to the invasion of Czechoslovakia were the most visible events to the world at the time, and information about developments in the intelligence and security organs became readily available only after the invasion, other factors were evident, exerting pressures and influence. One of the principal forces was the interplay between nations in the communist world. Here again the notion that all was unity and harmony and that the East bloc was in fact a bloc proves simplistic and untenable in the light of evidence. Reaction to the Czechoslovak experiment ranged from outright glee in mainland China and Albania, through support and approval from Yugoslavia, Rumania and--for a time--Hungary, to disapproval in Poland and Bulgaria and hostility in East Germany. While China and Albania saw the invasion as an opportunity to strike another blow at the Soviet Union for its imperialism, its refusal to recognize the possibility of national communism, Yugoslavia and Rumania viewed the liberalization movement in Czechoslovakia as an echo of their own achievements and aspirations. It was no accident that Czechoslovakia's friends lay to the south, the critics to the north. The bulk of NATO forces lay in northern Europe, where East German paranoids saw West German plots by the "militarist-revanchist" clique, and where European armies traditionally invaded.⁴⁵

National factors had a part in the alignment. East Germany, the former enemy, now "more Catholic than the Pope," had the most conservative communist leadership of the bloc. Ulbricht had come to power immediately

after the Second World War and stayed in power through the Stalin era. He had survived Khrushchev's liberalism and attempts to improve relations with West Germany and found a more congenial set of leaders in Brezhnev and Kosygin. Undoubtedly the appreciation was mutual and we may expect that Ulbricht's views received more than routine attention in Moscow. The fact that he was one of the last of the many high-level visitors to Czechoslovakia, and that his reception there was frosty, may well have confirmed his position on the issue; and his position in turn may have provided (to change the metaphor) the straw that broke the camel's back.⁴⁷ But Ulbricht's ideas did not depend on the reception in Karlovy Vary in August 1968. His antipathy to the Dubcek line had begun when closer Czechoslovak-West German economic collaboration became a possibility. Significantly, the first multinational meeting called expressly to hear Dubcek defend his government was held in Dresden. There, as early as March 1968, an attempt was made to reverse the political trend in Czechoslovakia and to arrest attempts at building an independent Czechoslovak foreign policy which included closer relations with West Germany. Reportedly the possibility of arranging among the participants for a major loan to Czechoslovakia in lieu of West German financial aid was also discussed.⁴⁸ In Ulbricht's view, such ties raised the specter of West German influence in the eastern bloc, a specter that he feared more than he feared a military adventure. David Binder, writing from Leipzig in the New York Times on March 11, described the "mounting disquiet over the ferment in neighboring Czechoslovakia" and explained the East German "fear that the events in Czechoslovakia and other members of the bloc could lead to further

isolation of their regime in the only international club in which they are full members." Three days later in another article he pointed to the growing sense of paranoia in East Germany, saying that Neues Deutschland, the official newspaper of the East German Communist Party, was hinting of "counterrevolutionary forces and 'imperialist opponents' . . . at work in both Prague and Warsaw." Ulbricht's fears, grounded in the possibility of West German influences in the east, were fundamentally ideological--fears of a hard-line conservative whose own position might be jeopardized by infectious liberalism surrounding his nation.

The Polish government also saw national problems arising out of the Prague Spring. Just before the Dresden meeting, the Polish representative, Wladyslaw Gomulka, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, had to put down the worst student riot since 1956. It took militia forces several days to dislodge the students who occupied buildings at Warsaw University. Polish unrest perhaps came from the Prague Spring, and certainly received some inspiration from it, but rose to the surface because of the Warsaw National Theater production of *Dziady* (Ancestors), an 1832 play by Adam Mickiewicz dealing with Czarist rule in Poland and containing lines which had the effect of sparks on tinder; lines such as "the only things that Moscow sends here are jackasses, fools, or spies." Gomulka felt obliged to order the play closed. Only by force was the Polish government able to contain the student unrest, which bordered on rebellion.⁴⁹ Thereafter Gomulka joined Ulbricht as a foe of Prague's "January line." One authority, in an ironic vein, speculates that, had Czechoslovakia encouraged and supported the Polish students, "the virus

of revolt might then have spread to Hungary and even to East Germany, and Russia would have been faced with its greatest crisis since Stalin founded the Soviet empire." Instead, Dubcek deliberately underplayed events in Poland for fear of "antagonizing the Polish and Soviet governments. The result of this caution was that the Polish situation was stabilized, potential allies were lost, and five months later Polish troops and tanks were among the invaders who captured Czechoslovakia at the Kremlin's order."⁵⁰

To the south of Prague, Hungary was pursuing a liberalization program of its own. Surprisingly, the man who was installed by the Soviets in Budapest after Red Army tanks intervened in the 1956 Hungarian rebellion, Janos Kadar, had succeeded in subsequent years in consolidating his position to the point where he did not need Soviet guns to keep his office. He had steered a careful course between Soviet demands for control and an apparent desire to liberalize, gradually shifting from the former to the latter. While he did not seek or permit the freedom yielded by Dubcek to Czechoslovaks, events in Prague did influence Hungary, though in a controlled manner. For reasons similar to those which caused Czechoslovakia to seek economic reforms, Hungary was undergoing changes. Both countries based their reforms on theories of the Czechoslovak economist Ota Sik, who advocated almost a return to capitalism. As a result the Prague reform movement received considerable notice and support in the Hungarian press. It is generally believed that Kadar exercised a moderating influence in the international meetings which dealt with the Czechoslovak heresy. Tad Szulc states that "Janos Kadar was squarely

opposed to the 'police action' pushed by Gomulka and Ulbricht. As I was to learn later from Hungarian Communist sources, Kadar argued to the very end that a 'political solution' must be found for the Czechoslovak crisis. Older and mellowed, he surely remembered the tragedy of Budapest that had put him in power twelve years earlier."⁵¹

Most sympathetic and aggressively supportive to the Czechoslovak cause was the Rumanian premier, Nicolae Ceausescu, who had had a fairly lengthy and impressive record of defying Soviet leadership, including a walkout over the China issue at a preparatory meeting for the 1967 world Communist conference, a refusal to join the other Warsaw Pact nations in ratifying the nuclear nonproliferation treaty, negation of many features of the Warsaw Pact that infringed on the members' national sovereignty, a fairly independent foreign policy that included direct and friendly contact with China and the United States, and most specifically with regard to Czechoslovakia a refusal to attend the Dresden meeting in belief that it smacked of interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation--a continuing source of friction in Rumania's relations with the Soviets.⁵² Rumania refused to join the Warsaw Pact allies in any discussions of the Czechoslovak situation or, of course, to take part in the invasion. At the same time Ceausescu took measures at home aimed at de-Stalinizing his own country, such as reducing the powers of the secret police, denunciation of Rumania's former Stalinist ruler Gheorghiu-Dej, and restoring to respectability several prominent Rumanian personalities purged under Dej.⁵³

Support for Prague also came from Marshal Tito, the one Eastern European leader who had broken from Soviet domination and survived both the break and the subsequent introduction of many of the measures for which Dubcek was fighting. Both Ceausescu and Tito visited Prague in August 1968, just a few days before the invasion. Tito was in Czechoslovakia on August 9 and 10 and Ceausescu on August 15. Both were received with enthusiasm; Tito's welcome is described as "tumultuous" and "triumphant." The contrast of their reception to that of Ulbricht on August 12 was marked and ominous. Also ominous were references to a revival of the Little Entente, which Rockingham Gill suggests would have been "directed, not against the imperial pretensions of Budapest like the first Little Entente, but against the hegemony of Moscow."⁵⁴ The prospect of an alliance of Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia, heretics in the middle of the Warsaw Pact, must have produced violent reactions in Moscow.

The lineup in the Warsaw Pact was influenced by geography and ideology, as well as insecurity of the leadership. Reading from north to south, the sympathy for Czechoslovakia increased toward the south; militancy and hostility increased toward the north. Unfortunately for Czechoslovakia, influence upon the Kremlin was also stronger in the north, if for no other reason than that it coincided with the Soviet Union's own geopolitical priorities.

THE DECISION TO INVADE

But what of the Soviet Union itself? What were the internal concerns and pressures that ultimately led to the decision to invade? There is no doubt that the decision to invade Czechoslovakia was made in the Soviet Union. When it was made--by whom, in response to what provocation, motivated by what, influenced by whom? Such are the questions that tantalize.

Before examining Soviet participants in the decision, it is helpful to try to discover when the decision was taken. As noted earlier, some analysts equate the decision with the first signs of military preparation in early March or April 1968. Others see it triggered by publication of the heretical "2,000 Words" at the end of June.⁵⁵ Opposed to such interpretation is the fact that Soviet and allied troops were in Czechoslovakia in numbers large enough to hold the country as late as July and that a military intervention then would have seemed less cynical than the August invasion; they left to make way for a political confrontation at Cierna-nad-Tison on July 29.⁵⁶ We may therefore safely assume that the decision did not take place until sometime after the Cierna meeting.⁵⁷ Given that assumption, the decision must have been made between the end of the Cierna conference on August 1 and the invasion on August 21. This time frame can be narrowed, since the Cierna meeting was followed by another meeting at Bratislava on August 3. The agreement reached at Cierna was ratified at Bratislava by the concerned allies, in the persons of Dubcek and Josef Smrkovsky (President of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly and Deputy

to Dubcek), Brezhnev and Kosygin, Ulbricht, Gomulka, Kadar, and Zhivkov of Bulgaria. Had there been a decision between Cierna and Bratislava, the second meeting would either not have taken place or ratification would have been left to lesser luminaries. The importance of the principals at both meetings also militates against the theory that the decision to invade had been taken long before and that the two meetings were part of a deception to lull the Czechoslovaks and the world to inaction. The chief advocate of the deception theory is Sik, the economist who escaped after the invasion and who considered the Cierna and Bratislava meetings a "smoke screen" for invasion preparations. Even though his analysis appears questionable in terms of the stature of the participants, there is no doubt that deception was practiced by the military, in the form of that series of exercises which took place along the Czechoslovak borders--and for a time within Czechoslovakia. This form of deception need not, however, have any bearing on the decision to invade. Smrkovsky, in his recent deathbed memoirs, had a different view of the Soviets' stand on invasion at the time of the Cierna meeting,

I could not say that right at that moment they already had a perfectly clear idea of what to do and how to do it--at least, at the time of the Cierna meeting. But it is well known that they already had decided to occupy us. Even Gomulka's interpreter who emigrated to the West said that at Warsaw, Zivkov and some others wanted military intervention. However I am not completely convinced that the Soviet leaders had fully made up their minds about intervention. I believe that some obstacles still existed; that there was not a complete **identity** of views among them in that regard, and that all their demands were nothing but pretext.⁵⁸

At the end of the twenty-day period there are some substantial clues that the decision had been taken, permitting a further narrowing of the period under consideration. Thus the day before the invasion, on the twentieth, the Deputy Minister of the Interior, General Salgovic, briefed his staff concerning the impending invasion.⁵⁹ Salgovic and other conservative holdovers from the Novotny regime smoothed the path for the first group of invaders and tried to prevent undesirable publicity from reaching the outside world by ordering Prague radio to shut down. They succeeded in the former arrangement but failed in the latter. There is no question, however, that they knew of the invasion ahead of time. When they were told is not clear, but certainly they knew the Soviet decision not later than the seventeenth of August, the day a major contingent of Soviet KGB personnel secretly arrived in Prague to prepare for the invasion. The Czech Black Book, a remarkable account of events in Czechoslovakia in 1968, assembled by the Institute of History of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences after the Soviet invasion, describes the scene:

a special airplane carrying officials of the Soviet KGB had landed as early as August 17, 1968, at Ruzyne Airport /Prague/. These Soviet secret police officials, together with chiefs of the State Security, then prepared the measures that were to be taken at the time of the occupation.⁶⁰

We can say with certainty, therefore, that the decision to invade was made before August 17 and after August 3. Between those dates, events took place which may serve as cause, motive, and indications concerning the decision. The chronology below identifies events which are thought to have had a bearing.

August

- 3 Bratislava meeting. Statement following meeting significant for moderation in language and tone; limited to generalities.

- 5 General S. M. Shtemenko replaces General Mikhail I. Kazakov as Chief-of-Staff for Warsaw Pact forces.

Criticism of Czechoslovak government for dismissal of General Prchlik appears in Prague press. Prchlik was dismissed at the insistence of Soviet leaders.

- 9 Tito visits Czechoslovakia as sign of support and receives enthusiastic welcome. Stays through August 11.

Ulbricht proposes initiation of bilateral talks with West Germany.

Brezhnev and Podgorny go on vacation at Black Sea resort.

- 10 Draft Statutes of the Czechoslovak Communist Party are published in Prague. Statutes provided for secret balloting, open discussions, and right of minority to express its views even after majority decision. Greater intra-Party democratic principles run counter to Soviet position which is based on Leninist principles as defined by 10th CPSU in 1921.

End of Nemen exercise announced. Beginning of "communications exercise" in East Germany, Poland and Ukraine announced.

- 11 All Soviet forces of the Warsaw Pact placed on general alert.

- 12 Walter Ulbricht visits Dubcek in Karlovy Vary. Frosty reception. Meetings through August 13.

- 13 General Shtemenko visits Poland.

Czechoslovak Party Presidium criticizes political excesses at gatherings and demonstrations.

- 14 Marshal Grechko visits East Germany.

Soviet units in East Germany get marching orders; placed on emergency alert.

Anti-Czechoslovak polemics resume in Moscow press for first time since Cierna meeting.

August

- 15 Ceaulescu visits Czechoslovakia in demonstration of support; is welcomed enthusiastically. Stays through August 17.

Rude Pravo editor dismisses two liberal editors.

- 16 CPSU Politburo meeting.

Soviet Politburo members return from vacation.

Marshals Grechko, Yakubovsky, Yepishev and General Shtemenko meet in East Berlin.

- 17 Dubcek and Kadar meeting.

Marshals Grechko, Yakubovsky and Yepishev visit Warsaw.

Plenary session of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.

Czechoslovak Party Presidium urges editors to use restraint from anti-Soviet polemics.

KGB men arrive in Prague to prepare invasion.

In examining the critical period in August it becomes apparent that the minor commitments and generalities issued after the Bratislava meeting and the bland communique which followed the Cierna meeting are simply inadequate to account for the change from full crisis before Cierna to the calm following the Bratislava meeting. Something happened at those meetings which satisfied the Soviets and their northern allies but which was not revealed. Some commitment was made by Dubcek that he kept secret, his assurances to the contrary.⁶¹ Tad Szulc has referred to a six-point agreement to establish

control over the Czechoslovak press . . . prevent the organization of any political groups outside the National Front; to take measures to strengthen the People's Militia and other security forces; to assure the protection of conservative Communists opposed to the liberalization program;

to end the press polemics with the Soviet Union; and to remove from the Prague leadership at least two of the liberals most objectionable to Moscow.⁶²

Two events which took place on the 15th and 17th, dismissal of two liberal writers and urging by the Presidium for editorial restraint--inasmuch as they run counter to the prevailing liberal trend--were probably the beginnings of an attempt at fulfilling the commitments made at Cierna and Bratislava. It is perhaps not surprising that the Soviets saw this attempt as halfhearted and that when the Soviet press renewed its polemics on August 16 there was the charge that Dubcek had failed to live up to the Bratislava agreement.

Also significant is the increase in military activity, beginning with announcement on the tenth that yet another military exercise was to take place. Soviet forces went on alert on the 11th and an emergency alert on the 14th. There was a flurry of visits by Soviet military leaders to Germany and Poland, beginning on the 13th. By the 11th of August these leaders would have received their orders to invade; then they were engaged in last-minute preparation and coordination with allied forces.

Following this line of reasoning it appears that only two events could have been the final cause for the decision. The first, discussed earlier, was the threat of formation of a new Little Entente raised by Tito's visit and reception on August 9 and by announcement on the 7th that Ceausescu also would be visiting Prague. At least one analyst has recognized this possibility:

While a prime political motive for marching on Czechoslovakia was fear of the spread of Prague's liberalizing ideas, this, too, seems to lack the urgency to precipitate an invasion at short notice. It is therefore likely that the real trigger was some unforeseen eventuality. In the wake of Marshal Josip Tito's triumphal stay in Prague from 9 to 11 August, it may have seemed to those 'minding the shop' in the Kremlin and to Ambassador Stepan V. Chervonenko in Prague that a new version of the Little Entente was coming into being dangerously fast.⁶³

Ulbricht's announcement on the 9th that he intended to initiate exploratory talks with the West Germans undoubtedly served the Kremlin as a strong hint that he was unhappy with their inaction and would also begin making his own foreign policy if the Czechoslovaks were not curbed.⁶⁴

The other possible final cause for the decision lies in the Soviet reaction to the Draft Statutes of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Not only did these run counter to Soviet political doctrine, but their publication at that moment served as the first post-Cierna indication that liberalization would not only continue but that it would probably accelerate. The Czechoslovak Communist Party's Central Committee, the Party's highest organ, was subordinate only to the occasional Party Congress. The 1968 Central Committee had a conservative membership of more than a third, which hampered and sometimes threatened the liberal government. To change that situation and increase representation the liberals in January had decided to convene the Fourteenth Party Congress (the 13th Congress had met in 1966) to establish a new Central Committee supported by delegates elected in the interim who they had every reason to expect would be liberals.⁶⁵ After several postponements the Congress was scheduled for September. The Soviets saw the threat to their conservative allies as

perhaps the key element in their loss of all control over political developments in Czechoslovakia.⁶⁶ The Draft Statutes published that August signaled Czechoslovak determination to hold the Congress on schedule, with predictable--and to the Soviets, totally unacceptable--results.⁶⁷

Whether in fact the Soviets were more concerned over the threat of a Little Entente or the impending 14th Congress will probably never be known. Both moves were unacceptable to them and in a sense were closely related. There is little doubt that, had the conservatives been nullified and Czechoslovakia able to continue with an independent foreign policy, some closer relationship to the maverick Yugoslavs and recalcitrant Rumanians would have taken place. In that sense it is immaterial which of the two events triggered the invasion. Triggered it was, and the two events must have served as the trigger or triggers.

The 14th Congress was actually held, under extraordinary circumstances. As the Soviets were invading the country, a call went out moving the date of the Congress up to the 22d of August. Of the 1,545 properly elected delegates, 1,192 met, condemned the invasion, elected a new Central Committee without any conservative membership, and reelected Dubcek as First Secretary. The importance ascribed by the Soviets to this transgression is reflected in the Moscow Protocol, which was signed by the Czechoslovak leaders under conditions close to duress. It provided for the invalidation of the 14th Congress.⁶⁸ Smrkovsky's memoirs recalled the scene when he was being urged to sign and asked Bohuslav Kucera, the Minister of Justice, whether as Chairman of the Czechoslovak

National Assembly he had the legal right to sign. He received an evasive answer and was later blamed for doing so--a factor which became one of his "sins" when he was politically liquidated in 1969.⁶⁹ In September 1969 the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party actually declared the Congress illegal--a procedure akin to a child denying its parent.

With regard to the Soviet decision, there are no certain answers, although one thing is clear: we cannot apply the techniques of systems analysis or probability theory, for we have every reason to believe that the Soviet government often acts under the influence of an inner logic that appears far from rational, or even clearly purposive, despite the fact that we can look back at a series of Soviet decisions or actions, discover a trend, and ascribe principle or purpose. Edward Crankshaw in his foreword to the second volume of Khrushchev's memoirs explains the problem:

For me . . . the particular interest of this volume is that it brings home more sharply even than the first (perhaps because there is less action and violence to distract the attention) the primitive nature of the government of the Soviet Union, which wields absolute power over one-sixth of all the land in the world and dominates half a dozen European countries. This seems to me of extreme importance. For one of the most serious mistakes of the West, and perhaps the hardest to overcome in anyone who has not lived in the Soviet Union for any length of time, has been to overrate, often to an absurd degree, the knowledge and understanding of the world enjoyed by the Soviet leadership, to say nothing of the level of intelligence and awareness of those Party functionaries who control every aspect of Soviet life. The mistake is serious because it has led us again and again to attribute great subtlety and exactitude of calculation to manifestations of Soviet government behavior which often arise from ignorance and muddle.⁷⁰

There nonetheless are some clues, some generally accepted views of what governed Soviet behavior in 1968. What can be done is to identify the ingredients, as well as the individuals, in the decision.

For one thing it is clear that the individuals making decisions for the U.S.S.R. undoubtedly saw events in Czechoslovakia through the eyes of on-the-scene Soviet advisers as interpreted by the traditionally conservative "revisionist-under-every-bed" KGB. Here there was a lack of reliable sources because of changes in informants during the Prague Spring. No enlightenment could come from the Soviet ambassador, Chervonenko, who doubtless was offering advice of a wisdom similar to that he had dispensed some years before in China. For the Soviets there was, to be sure, no alternative source of information--the Soviet Union does not send out journalists or reporters to offer independent judgments in the public press on issues of foreign policy, military or political.

Then there were the opinions of the Soviet marshals, set out earlier. We know that the Soviet military, concerned from the beginning that events in Czechoslovakia would weaken the Warsaw Pact, sought an end to the situation. There are indications that although they recognized the possible need for an invasion and prepared for it, they did not favor a military solution to what was really a political problem; in fact there are indications that some of the Soviet marshals were ready to accept Czechoslovak assurances of loyalty to their Warsaw Pact commitments. Defense Minister Grechko is believed to have advocated a political solution rather than involve the Red Army in another Budapest 1956.

Nevertheless as the Prague Spring turned into summer and no political progress seemed possible, it is probable that the marshals supported military intervention.

Among the allies there was a split that reduced their influence. Except for Hungary, this split was an old quarrel which carried through all of Moscow's foreign policy dealings. It was in fact an ideological difference regarding the principle of national self-determination, a form of heresy which antedated the Prague Spring. The Soviet view of international relations among allies was first challenged by Yugoslavia, later by Albania and China, finally by Rumania. Hungary, leaning in that direction, reversed itself on the issue of Czechoslovakia at the last moment. For that reason these nations' views, though clearly stated, probably had no large influence in the decision. In the Kremlin's eyes their advice must have appeared as hopelessly prejudiced and wrong.⁷¹

One comes down to the decision in the Politburo. Certainly the decision to intervene was made in the Politburo of the Central Committee and it may be assumed that all members were there. Most clearly opposed to the invasion probably was M. A. Suslov, Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee, a man whom Stalin's daughter describes as "one of the most reactionary men, one who tended calves in his youth."⁷² He is believed to have made a conciliatory speech at Cierna and to have been criticized by those who favored more stern policies.⁷³ It is generally held that despite his conservatism he, as the Party's chief ideologue, had been the moving force behind the project of organizing a world Communist summit conference to develop a common line on issues

such as the Sino-Soviet ideological quarrel. He probably foresaw the negative effect the invasion would have on foreign Communist parties and pleaded for caution. Most clearly opposed to Suslov and for the invasion was apparently P. Ye. Shelest, First Secretary of the Ukraine Communist Party Central Committee. He has been described as an advocate of radical action, uncompromisingly opposed to Prague, one of those who pushed the button.⁷⁴ His motives may have been geographic, since his ideological domain abutted the eastern end of Czechoslovakia. At celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Ukrainian Communist Party in June 1968 he had made a virulent attack on the "social-democratic" idea and "democratization of socialism."⁷⁵ Tagged as hardline conservatives and probably supporting Shelest were Politburo members A. P. Kirilenko, D. S. Polyansky, Kiril Mazurov, Arvid Pelshe, and Politburo Secretary Konstantin Katushev. Probably supporting Suslov were Politburo members Gennady Voronov and Aleksandr Shelepin, and Politburo Secretary Boris Ponomarev. Foreign Secretary Gromyko is believed to have advocated the harsh line.⁷⁶ As to the three principals, the Chairman of the Presidium, N. V. Podgorny, although believed to have played a mediating role at Cierna, is considered a hawk; the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, A. N. Kosygin, is generally held to have been a dove; and the General Secretary of the Central Committee, L. I. Brezhnev, is described as typically vacillating but leaning toward the right.

Here then, in summary, were the ingredients that led to the decision to invade. The decision was made between August 3d and August 10th 1968. The Soviet Union's misinformation (as opposed to disinformation) came

partly from loss of reliable and relatively objective intelligence sources, partly the ineptitude of Ambassador Chervonenko, and partly from the system's lack of journalistic sources. The immediate cause of the decision to invade was either the threat of a Little Entente independent of the Soviet political and eventually military sphere of influence, or the threat of a total loss of political influence in Czechoslovakia's internal affairs in connection with predictable changes resulting from the 14th Party Congress. Or it was a combination of these two threats. The more fundamental cause of the decision was, of course, the perceived loss of Czechoslovakia as a political or military ally, due to the forces of an uncontrolled liberalization that would rapidly drive the country into the hands of the revenge-seeking West Germans. Moscow was subjected to pro-invasion pressure from allies in northern Europe who saw their own conservative governments threatened. Counterpressure came from allies in southern Europe who shared Prague's views on national self-determination and from communist leaders throughout the world who saw military invasion as a regression to cold-war tactics totally unacceptable to their membership. Moscow's internal pressures likewise came from both ends of the ideological scale, including the apolitical views of the military who saw a gap in Warsaw Pact defenses but did not wish to involve the Red Army in a military solution to a political problem.

The decision thus was made. Ambassador Chervonenko believed that the Soviets would be welcomed in Prague and would have no difficulty finding Czechoslovak volunteers to appeal for intervention and provide an excuse for the invasion--volunteers with the political support necessary to form

a puppet government with which the Soviets could deal. The opposite proved to be the case and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, generally considered a fine display of military efficiency, was a total failure in its immediate political objective.⁷⁷

NATO REACTIONS

There is no question that Soviet pre-invasion calculations and deliberations included an assessment of the effects the invasion of Czechoslovakia would have on NATO. That the Soviets decided to invade does not mean they dismissed NATO reactions as insignificant--it means that the political motives which caused them to choose invasion were sufficiently compelling to risk the reaction of NATO. Likelihood of a NATO military response was none too great, and this probability was apparent early. The United States was heavily committed in Southeast Asia, with a half million troops in Vietnam, leaving its European forces considerably under strength. NATO had lost much of its vitality as a military alliance and there was open doubt whether it would survive the next year when the treaty came up for renewal on its twentieth birthday. France's defection from the military part of the alliance, pressures in the United States for reducing troop commitments in Europe, reluctance among other NATO allies to build up forces to replace US troops--all these reflected an increasing sense of security in Europe, a feeling that the era of naked force had passed, that the cold war had shifted from military threats to economic rivalry. The Soviets could safely assume that NATO would not respond to the provocation with military action. This assumption had been virtually confirmed over the months of military pressures and threats against Czechoslovakia when NATO was taking no sides and doing everything possible to insure that there was no Soviet misunderstanding of NATO's position.⁷⁸ The West German government announced on

July 23 that maneuvers scheduled to be held along the West German border in Bavaria would be postponed or held elsewhere, a decision applauded by US officials.⁷⁹ In the later words of the US Ambassador to NATO,

The first reaction of the North Atlantic Alliance to the mounting Czech crisis--before the invasion--was to watch carefully but lie low. Despite the big build-up of Warsaw Pact forces around Czechoslovakia, despite their vigorous manoeuvres not far from NATO's borders, the political judgement (that this threat was directly against a Pact ally, not against the NATO alliance) led to agreed Allied policy; scrupulously to avoid giving the Russians any Western excuse to move into Czechoslovakia.⁸⁰

NATO was in an impossible position in regard to the Czechoslovak crisis. Any kind of military commitment in support of Czechoslovakia or action in opposition to the invasion would have led to a direct confrontation between US and Soviet troops--a contretemps that conjures the vision of thermonuclear war, a juxtaposition that has been carefully avoided in most of our military moves and theirs since World War II. Proclamations of support for the Czechoslovak government, offers of assistance, and military countermeasures to the Soviet maneuvers would have strengthened the hawk element in the Politburo and undermined Dubcek's protestations that his nation was loyal to the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, and to socialism. As it was, the issue remained an internal Warsaw Pact problem and NATO could not be blamed for it. Again, in Ambassador Cleveland's words:

This restraint was not, as restraint so often is, the paralysis of timidity. It was a conscious policy consensus in the North Atlantic Council. It did not save the Czechs, of course; nor was it intended to. But the policy 'worked' in the sense of helping to make ridiculously unbelievable the pathetic attempts to pin the ideological 'crimes' of the Czechoslovak leaders on 'imperialists' and other dark forces of external subversion.⁸¹

Implicit in Ambassador Cleveland's words was a full awareness on NATO's part of the military buildup during that summer, and of course of the maneuvers which succeeded one another up to the day of invasion. The Western press featured daily headlines and articles on troop sightings in East Germany and Poland. One of the alliance's functions was a pooling of information collected by member nations, enabling all members to develop estimates of the military situation from a common set of facts.⁸² Western intelligence noted major military moves in East Germany and Poland on the very day that the Cierna talks began.⁸³ NATO was aware of the final augmentation three weeks before the invasion. Szulc in early August was told by US officials that some 400,000 Warsaw Pact troops and 300 aircraft were in place, and ready to move.⁸⁴

The judgments which NATO intelligence estimators, military planners, and policymakers had to consider were not whether there were forces being built up, but whether they would be used--when they would be used, and against whom. Critics who accuse NATO of having failed to perceive the threat arising in East Europe confuse the capability to invade with the intention to do so. The "lie-low" policy described by Ambassador Cleveland demonstrates that NATO judged Soviet intentions correctly with regard to NATO interests--the forces would not be used against the West. According to one journalistic account, "No one believed that the Czechoslovak crisis had been engineered simply to provide a cover for the necessary forward deployment of troops directed against NATO. It is therefore not surprising that no announcement emerged on 21 August of any NATO alert."⁸⁵ With regard to the prediction that the Soviets would invade Czechoslovakia,

NATO analysts certainly could not be expected to make a judgment that had not yet been made in Moscow. Nevertheless, based on capability, the NATO intelligence services initiated careful and regular coverage of the Czechoslovak situation and of Warsaw Pact actions and reactions to it, beginning in mid-May. By late July, NATO military and political leaders were well aware that the Soviets had the capability to invade Czechoslovakia on very short notice.⁸⁶ NATO warning doctrine at the time assumed two levels of warning: first, a political warning based on the logic that an attack on NATO had to be preceded by increased tensions; and second a strategic warning, resulting from intelligence acquired on the necessary buildup of forces for such an invasion. NATO doctrine had recognized that after receipt of these warnings, intelligence of the timing of an actual attack would be difficult if not impossible, i.e., that tactical surprise was a realistic possibility. Ambassador Cleveland's account of this problem is emphatic and unambiguous:

As far as it went, therefore, our analysis in NATO was about right: the Soviets, we thought, were massing most of their strength in Eastern Europe on the Czech border. NATO correctly guessed [sic] that these very large military movements . . . were not aimed against NATO; they were designed either to pressure the Czechs or, if the pressure failed, to be ready for invasion. What we didn't know was whether they would invade. . . . Certainly the military plan was laid long before all the negotiating and palavering in Warsaw, Cierna and Bratislava. But the political decision was evidently taken quite late in the game.⁸⁷

Although intelligence estimators might object to a characterization of their judgment that the Soviets were not threatening NATO as a "guess," there could hardly be a more authoritative account of the NATO warning

situation, or a more clear-cut example of how it works (and that it works) in real life.

Incidentally, with regard to the above "guess" there is a lesson to be learned for the future. In an article a year after the invasion General von Kielmansegg, the West German Commander in Chief of Allied Forces in Central Europe from 1966 to 1968, pointed out that the Soviets "continuously increased their military readiness without revealing their political intent."⁸⁸ The general is in fact pointing with alarm at the same warning issue which the ambassador viewed with satisfaction. And while the ambassador's pride in the past was justified in light of the accuracy of NATO's estimate of the Soviet threat, the general was sounding a warning for the future. The lesson will not be lost on the Soviets--indeed a reading of Cleveland's article is all they need--that a political crisis such as the Czechoslovak heresy, and a military solution such as the invasion, would present an excellent deception for preparation of a first strike. The next time, despite the possible consequences to the unfortunate heretic nation, NATO should not risk its military strategy based solely on an estimate of Soviet intentions--it must react to the Soviets in terms of their capability. This advice was given to NATO political leaders during the summer of 1968 by the military commanders, Generals Lemnitzer, von Kielmansegg, and Hackett.⁸⁹ The next time it cannot be ignored. NATO's reaction must be unambiguous to the Soviets and clearly reflect the limits of NATO vital interests. That lesson is drawn from the Soviets' own failure at the time to clarify the extent of their "socialist commonwealth" which they claimed a right to "defend."

In the words of a European diplomat, "The Russians have said they're serious about protecting their harem, but they haven't said how big it is." Did it include Yugoslavia? Albania? Austria? And in today's world, Portugal . . . ?

NOTES

1. "The result, on December 8, was a flying visit to Prague by Soviet Communist Party chief Leonid I. Brezhnev, who spoke to representatives of both factions and saw nothing in the situation to disturb Soviet interests. This was, after all, not a liberal-conservative split threatening to make Czechoslovakia a maverick like Yugoslavia if the wrong side won. . . . reports held that Brezhnev refrained from exerting any pressure once he had concluded that the squabble was purely internal. In any case, Brezhnev departed knowing that Novotny might be ousted as Czechoslovak Party chief but leaving as his parting words to the feuding factions, 'This is your affair.' Novotny is said to have bitterly declared afterward that he would have been better off if he had not invited Brezhnev. In any case, a Soviet hands-off policy had been proclaimed. Brezhnev and the Soviet Politburo he headed had made a historic mistake." Harry Schwartz, Prague's 200 Days (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 64-65.
2. William Shawcross, Dubcek (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 141. Shawcross goes on to describe the Dubcek-Brezhnev relationship: "There is a story that Dubcek and Brezhnev first met and became friends whilst studying at the Moscow School together. This story is unconfirmed, but Stefan Dubcek (Alexander's father), amongst others, swore that it was true. There is no record of Brezhnev having attended the College but the story may be based on the fact that they did meet, outside the School, during those years."
3. "Only the Soviet Union's willingness to buy Czechoslovakia's excess output saved the day, because Moscow paid with oil, iron ore, and non-ferrous metals, without which the Czechoslovak economy could not have functioned. From the giant neighbor to the east came also a substantial proportion of the wheat for the bread of the Czechs and the Slovaks. But by the mid-1960's, complaints were coming from Moscow, too--hints that Soviet economists were beginning to think it would be more profitable to end this trade of first-class foods and raw materials for second-class machinery." Schwartz, p. 30.
4. Ibid., p. 98.
5. Robert C. Tucker, The Soviet Political Mind (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 195. "The Presidium, reduced to its pre-1952 size immediately upon Stalin's death, became a 'collective'--that is, a talking, freely debating, voting, fighting, and feuding--organ of the government, with some apparent effort to introduce political order into its workings (although one problem, the Beria issue, was reportedly settled with a pistol at one of its meetings)." The scene is described more vividly by Robert Payne, whose account is based on statements made by Khrushchev himself. According to these, Beria was tricked to attend a meeting of

the Presidium without his usual armed bodyguards. "Beria sat down and the meeting began. Malenkov took the floor, but instead of saying what Beria expected, he launched into a brief and violent indictment, accusing Beria of conspiracy and informing him that he would be judged during this very meeting. As soon as he heard this, Beria realized that he had been tricked. He jumped up and reached for the pistol in his pocket, but before he could get at it, those nearest--Koniev, Moskolenko, Mikoyan and Malenkov himself--jumped him, got him by the throat and strangled him." Robert Payne, The Rise and Fall of Stalin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 703-704.

6. Ladislav Bittman, The Deception Game (Syracuse: Syracuse University Research Corporation, 1972), p. 161-162.
7. John Barron, KGB (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974), p. 142.
8. Bittman, p. 159.
9. Barron, p. 1-2.
10. Ibid., p. 14-15.
11. The New York Times, 3 March 1968, p. 15.
12. Ibid., 4 March 1968, p. 37.
13. Ibid., 7 March 1968, p. 18.
14. Ibid., 11 March 1968, p. 3.
15. Victor Kusin, ed., The Czechoslovak Reform Movement (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 1972), p. 37.
16. Ibid., p. 37.
17. "Mamula had been, in effect, Czechoslovakia's top security agent and a close associate of the Soviet KGB. Although the security service was in theory subordinated to the Interior Ministry, Mamula ran it directly with the aid of Deputy Interior Minister Viliam Salgovic, a Slovak and a truly sinister personage on the Czechoslovak scene. A tough, swarthy, bespectacled man in his late forties, Salgovic was also a KGB liaison officer and played a most important role in the preparations for the Soviet invasion. The security apparatus was like a state-within-a-state governed by Mamula and Salgovic with virtually no reference to the Interior Ministry or even the Party Presidium. Firing Mamula, whom Dubcek assigned to work as a clerk at the aircraft plant at Letnany, represented the first major act in dismantling the secret police and placing it under the government's orders No official reason was given for firing Mamula, but initiates knew that he had been removed because of his involvement in the

December plot to stage a preventive military coup on Novotny's behalf Replacing Mamula was Lieutenant General Prchlik, the man who had warned Dubcek of the coup and then prevailed upon the regional commands to remain neutral in the power struggle." Tad Szulc, Czechoslovakia Since World War II (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 279.

18. Ibid., p. 279.
19. The New York Times, 16 March 1968, p. .
20. Ibid., 23 March 1968, p. .
21. Szulc, p. 282.
22. David Floyd, "The Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968," Brassey's Annual, 1969, p. 38.
23. Pavel Tigrid, Why Dubcek Fell (London: MacDonald, 1969), p. 64-65.
24. Kusin, p. 57.
25. "With the downfall of Novotny in January, and the dismantling of his dependable political machine, the Kremlin lost its direct pipeline inside the Central Committee of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party. Henceforth the Soviet embassy in Prague had to rely on inexperienced secret agents recruited pell-mell for its disrupted espionage network--without which the Kremlin cannot function properly." Isaac Levine, Intervention (New York: David McKay, 1969), p. 78.
26. Ronald Hingley, The Russian Secret Police (London: Hutchinson, 1970), p. 170.
27. Robert Conquest describes the conspiracy in detail: "As early as December 1936, some sort of machinations to compromise the Soviet High Command were already afoot. In the first week of December . . . The first move in the whole dark business, which 'originated with Stalin,' appears to have been an NKVD story sent through Skoblin to Berlin to the effect that the Soviet High Command and Tukhachevsky in particular were engaged in a conspiracy with the German General Staff. Though this was understood in SD circles as an NKVD plant, . . . Several Soviet and other accounts make it clear that the story of the German contacts with Tukhachevsky was originally 'leaked' by the Nazis through President Benes of Czechoslovakia. Benes had the information as early as the last months of 1936 (and confidentially passed it on to the French, whose confidence in the Franco-Soviet Pact was considerably weakened by it). He also, as several recent Soviet accounts agree, passed the reports to Stalin, in all good faith. Gomulka tells us that this false information had been planted some time before the documentary 'evidence' arrived, so that preliminary reports of the 'treason' were in Stalin's hands 'at the time of the February-March plenum.'

The creation of the actual documentary evidence, however, was an artistic job and took time Largely the work of the German engraver Franz Putzig, who had long been employed by the German secret agencies on false passports and so on, it consisted of thirty-two pages and had attached to it a photograph of Trotsky with German officials the German security service got genuine signatures of Tukhachevsky from the 1926 secret agreement between the two High Commands by which technical assistance to the Soviet Air Force was arranged. A letter was forged using this signature, and Tukhachevsky's style was imitated The German generals' signatures were obtained from bank cheques. Hitler and Himmler were shown the dossier in early May, and approved the operation. The SD . . . got it directly to Yezhov It was in Stalin's hands by mid-May." /Yezhov, Nikolai, member of Secretariat & Head of Party Control Commission; Reinhardt Heydrich, chief of SD/ Robert Conquest, The Great Terror (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 218, 219.

The conspiracy's effects on the Red Army are described in official Soviet writings, following the Khrushchev exposure of Stalin's methods: "Among the circumstances contributing to the inadequate preparedness of the Red Army for repelling a sudden attack by a strong and crafty enemy was the great loss and damage inflicted on our military cadres, especially the senior echelon, by the criminal gang of Yezhov and Beria (both of the hated NKVD or Secret Police). As a result of the unfounded repressions in the prewar years, the Soviet Armed Forces were deprived of a significant number of experienced commanders." Lt. Col. Ye. I. Korablev and Col. M. I. Loginov, KPSS i Stroitelstvo Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR 1918-Iyun 1941. Military Press of the Ministry of Defense of the USSR, Moscow, 1959, p. 431.

28. Levine, p. 80-82.

29. Czechoslovakia's key geographic position in the ground defense (or offense) scheme of the Warsaw Pact is surpassed by her unique air defense role: "The whole problem of Czechoslovakia is that it is where it is, and for the military that it is a stop-up against West Germany. It forms the key part of the air-defense command of the Warsaw Pact. Incidentally, the Warsaw Pact is far more important as an air-defense command organization than as an organisation of ground operation." Kusin, p. 56-57.

30. W. W. Kulski, The Soviet Union in World Affairs (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), p. 122.

31. Paul Shirk, "Warsaw Treaty Organization," Military Review, May 1969, p. 36.

32. E. L. Crowley, ed., Prominent Personalities in the USSR (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1968), p. 688. See also John Erickson, "Towards a 'New' Soviet High Command," The Royal United Service Institution Journal, September 1969, p. 41.

33. Floyd, p. 38.
34. Schwartz, p. 130.
35. Aviation Week, 25 March 1968, p. 11.
36. The statement, according to Radio Prague, 7 May 1968, was made at a closed meeting of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, in April 1968. Michael Csizmas, Der Warschauer Pakt (Bern: SOI Verlag), p. 89. See also Galia Golan, Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), p. 225, and Fritz Ermarth, Internationalism, Security, and Legitimacy (The Rand Corporation, 1969), p. 77.
37. The New York Times, 18 May 1968, p. 1.
38. Floyd ascribes Yepishev's words to a decision made at "a Central Committee meeting of the Soviet Communist Party taking place on 9 and 10 April. Even those who were interested did not learn much, because the proceedings were held in the usual secrecy and no report was published, even to this day, of the speeches made by Brezhnev and others. Yet there is little doubt that it was at that meeting that the Russian leaders took the decision to bring Czechoslovakia back into the fold at all costs, including, if need be, the use of military force. It was perhaps not entirely accidental that word slipped out that no less a person than General Alexey Yepishev, the head of the main political administration of the Soviet armed forces, had declared at the meeting that the Soviet Army was ready to 'do its duty' if the situation in Czechoslovakia demanded and would respond to an appeal from 'loyal' Czechoslovak communists if they had difficulty in 'safeguarding socialism.'" Floyd, p. 40.
39. Ibid., p. 42.
40. Szulc, p. 334.
41. Thomas W. Wolfe, Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 378-379.
42. Robert Rhodes James, ed., The Czechoslovak Crisis 1968 (Sussex: Wendenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 53. Mastny describes the July maneuvers as "the biggest peacetime maneuvers in Soviet history" Vojtech Mastny, ed., Czechoslovakia: Crisis in World Communism (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1972), p. 49.
43. Even the infamous Action Program of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, published in early April and outlining intra-Party reforms, contained words designed to calm the fears of Warsaw Pact allies: ". . . we shall contribute more actively and with a more elaborated concept to the joint activities of the Council of Mutual Economic Aid and the Warsaw Treaty." Robin A. Remington, Winter in Prague (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1969), The Action Program of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Document 16, p. 134.

44. Golan, p. 327.

The New York Times, on 31 July 1968, in an article speculating on military intervention, stated that the Soviet marshals are said to "favor a moderate approach to Prague . . . /and to/ consider Czechoslovak military cooperation within the Warsaw Pact to have been exemplary. They are reported to be in favor of accepting Czechoslovak assurances of loyalty to the alliance over a military adventure."

45. Vernon V. Aspaturian, in an article on the consequences of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, points to the polarization of the Soviet satellites: "Significantly, the countries to the north of Prague supported and indeed encouraged Moscow to intervene, while the southern tier with the exception of Moscow's loyal satrapy of Bulgaria, i.e., Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and even Albania supported the Dubcek regime. Hungary reluctantly participated in the military intervention because it was under Soviet military occupation itself, but East Germany and Poland participated in the occupation with considerable enthusiasm. Not only does Czechoslovakia cut the Eastern European countries into two parts geographically, but it also conjures up the image of an 'invasion funnel' leading from West Germany to Russia, or a 'knife' aimed by West Germany at the heart of the Ukraine. Decisions, unfortunately, are often influenced by such banal metaphors" William I. Zartman, ed., Czechoslovakia, Intervention and Impact (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 36.

46. In 1964, when Khrushchev was making overtures to Bonn and preparing a controversial first visit there, an editorial in Ulbricht's newspaper asked whether ". . . a certain person should . . . open the door to the burglar who had once broken into his own house." Neues Deutschland, 9 August 1964.

Henry Kamm, in a column in The New York Times of 25 August 1968, describes Walter Ulbricht as ". . . the most doctrinaire and aggressive leader. In the absence of bold leadership in the Kremlin, he has consistently been suspected by knowledgeable Communists of using his craft and guile to lead the Soviet Union toward his goals."

Ulbricht's fears and influence are shown in the following citations: "Brezhnev and Suslov, it may be recalled, had taken special pains to allay East German fears of a sellout just prior to Khrushchev's overthrow" and "The new Soviet leaders (Brezhnev and Kosygin) hastened to reassure Ulbricht that no Soviet deal with Bonn at Pankow's expense was in the works" Wolfe, p. 282, 298.

47. "Ulbricht arrived for talks in Karlovy Vary on 13 August, one day before polemics resumed from Moscow. While it remains unclear just how much of a role Ulbricht's visit played in the Soviet decision to invade, Brezhnev is reported to have repeated to the 16 August CPSU Politburo meeting Ulbricht's remarks in Dresden that 'if Czechoslovakia continues to

follow the January line, all of us here will run a very serious risk which may well lead to our own downfall.' It was this meeting, in possession of a report from Ulbricht's trip, which reportedly decided finally and unanimously upon the invasion" Golan, p. 24-25.

48. Vojtech Mastny, Czechoslovakia: Crisis in World Communism (New York: Facts on File, 1962), p. 18.

49. Szulc, p. 293, 294.

50. Harry Schwartz describes the Kadar liberalization process in some detail and concludes that "It was reasonable to expect Kadar to look with some sympathy and understanding on what Dubcek hoped to do" but also points to friction areas between the two countries; notably the plight of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia who ". . . resented what they considered Slovak domination and cultural pressure" Although Kadar was sympathetic to the Czechoslovak liberalization movement, he did at the last minute augment the invading forces with Hungarian troops. Schwartz, p. 122.

51. Szulc, p. 319.

52. Mastny, p. 18.

One of the more ironic touches is that the Rumanians, as early as 1966, advocated a change in the practice of selecting only Soviet officers to fill the post of commander in chief of Warsaw Pact forces, in favor of rotation among officers of participating nations. Lt. Gen. Vaclav Prchlik, the head of the Czechoslovak Central Committee's military department, was removed from office in July 1968, at Soviet insistence, for uttering precisely the same heresy. Mastny, p. 53, and Galia Golan, Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), p. 230.

53. The New York Times, 29 April 1968, p. 38.

54. Rockingham Gill, "Europe's Military Balance After Czechoslovakia," Military Review, January 1969, p. 54.

Hungary's reactions to the possibility of an Entente had a fateful effect on the ultimate fate of Czechoslovakia: "Nevertheless, such an Entente would have isolated Hungary, a situation which would have undermined Kadar's regime. The possibility that it was this situation which finally convinced Kadar to join forces with the conservatives should not be excluded. However, Kadar continued to attempt to temper the decision to the last minute, meeting with Dubcek on the 17th of August to reason with him and persuade him to live up to his commitments." Richard Lowenthal, "The Sparrow in the Cage," Problems of Communism, Vol. XVII, No. 6, p. 21.

55. Floyd, p. 40. See also Lowenthal, p. 14.

56. Philip Windsor and Adam Roberts, Czechoslovakia, 1968: Reform, Repression and Resistance (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 76-77.
57. Kusin, p. 62.
58. Andrej Petr, "Smrkovsky Deathbed Memoirs" (Milan, Giorni-Vie Nuove, 12 March 1975), p. 43.
59. Szulc, p. 372-373.
60. Robert Littell, The Czech Black Book (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 65.
61. "4 August. On television Dubcek promises that no secret agreements were reached at Cierna or at Bratislava" Shawcross, p. 251.
62. Szulc, p. 364.
63. Gill, p. 54.
64. "One might even make out a case that the desperate and hasty disavowal of the Bratislava agreement was actually triggered not so much by Dubcek's refusal or inability to satisfy some reputed secret commitment to arrest liberalization, but rather by Ulbricht's unexpected gesture of reconciliation with West Germany To Moscow this may have been an evil omen of impending catastrophe unless she intervened to stop the falling Czech domino." Zartman, p. 34.
65. Pavel Tigrid describes the motives behind the Fourteenth Party Congress: "The decision to hold this Congress was made at a plenary session of the Central Committee at the end of May, when the Prague Spring was in full bloom. It was a political decision of the first order. The structure of the Central Committee presented a potential but constant danger to Dubcek and his supporters. It consisted predominantly of conservative and foot-dragging aparatchiks who did not want to rock the boat, but also of unreliable opportunists. Indeed, ever since January this majority was successful in postponing any serious discussion about the convocation of a Congress. Finally, at the May plenum, the reformists prevailed and the opening of the Congress was set for the 9th of September." Tigrid, p. 72.
66. ". . . the results of the Congress could not be doubted: all the hardline Novotny-type members of the Central Committee would be eliminated. From that moment on Dubcek's hands would really be freed, especially since domestic Quislings and Soviet agents were recruited exclusively from the conservative members of the Central Committee. Thus their elimination would have meant a substantial weakening of Soviet influence in the top Party and state organizations Once the decision to convoke the Extraordinary Congress was made, the Soviets had at all costs to prevent

its actually taking place. Some observers are of the opinion that the date of 9 September was a decisive one in Moscow's plans." Ibid.

67. The exiled journalist Pelikan underscores the importance of the Congress to the Soviet leaders: "I think that the main reason for the final decision of the Soviet leadership to invade Czechoslovakia was a political calculation of what would happen at the 14th Party Congress scheduled for 9 September. After all, the previous pressures had been exerted with the aim of avoiding a direct military intervention while at the same time dividing the Czech political leadership and forcing it into concessions. After Cierna and when analysing the composition of delegates to the Congress and the proposals to be submitted before it, the Soviet leadership realised that in the future Central Committee and Praesidium there would be no die-hard conservatives and that therefore a military intervention after the Congress, while still possible, would be much more difficult. There would be, then, a homogeneous leadership of the people, like Ceausescu did." Kusin, p. 57-58.

68. "The Presidium of the CC KSC announced that the so-called 14th Congress of the KSC, opened August 22, 1968, without the agreement of the CC, violated party statutes. Without the participation of the members of the Presidium, secretaries, secretaries of the CC KSS, most of the delegates from the army and many other organizations, it is invalid. All measures pertinent to this problem will be taken by the Presidium of the CC KSC upon its return to the CSSR. A special meeting will be called after the situation has been normalized within the party and the country." Point No. 2, The Moscow Protocol, Document 58, Remington, p. 379.

69. Petr, 19 March 1975, p. 43.

70. Edward Crankshaw, ed., Khrushchev Remembers, Vol. 2 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. vii-viii.

71. Wolfe, p. 376. Similar views were held by many of the leaders of the world communist movement who were not tainted by heresy. Their voices were heard in Moscow and are believed to have been more influential than those of Tito or Ceausescu. Schwartz points out that one major reason why the Soviet leaders hesitated to risk a July military intervention was ". . . the widespread support Dubcek enjoyed among foreign Communists. By mid-July, the Kremlin could have no doubt that Czechoslovakia had the sympathy not only of Rumania and Yugoslavia but of almost all the Western European Communist parties, of the Japanese Communists, and of the normally pro-Soviet Communist Party of India. The Communist leaders of Italy and France, Luigi Longo and Waldeck Rochet, even flew to Moscow in this period to warn the Russians of the damage any military move against Prague would do to Communist strength in Western Europe . . . the Kremlin had been put on notice that an invasion of Czechoslovakia would fracture world Communist unity more drastically than ever before in history." Schwartz, p. 185-186.

72. Svetlana Alliluyeva, Only One Year (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 377.
73. The New York Times, 31 July 1968, p. 1.
74. Kusin, p. 61.
75. Quoted in Lowenthal, p. 14. The noted political analyst Adam Ulam clarifies Shelest's motives: "It was the abolition of censorship that especially incensed and alarmed the Russians and their conservative satellites. Ukrainian- and German-language publications appearing in Czechoslovakia were banned in Soviet Ukraine and East Germany. Among the Soviet Politburo it was Shelest, the Ukraine's boss, who was reputedly most insistent on the need for invasion: events in the neighboring country were stimulating dissent and local nationalism in the Ukraine." Adam Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 742.
76. The New York Times, 31 July 1968, p. 1.
77. Kulski describes the process: "The military occupation did not in fact produce an immediate Soviet political victory. The Soviet government was unable to bring a Czechoslovak Kadar in the wake of marching Soviet troops to form a new government immediately or to find Party leaders to replace Dubcek and his colleagues It seemed that the successful military operation had ended in a political failure. Western European Communist parties were stunned and denounced the Soviet intervention as an outrage." Kulski, p. 329. More succinctly, Windsor and Roberts point out: ". . . the contrast between the smooth efficiency with which the Soviet military machine took over Czechoslovakia and the ludicrous political improvisation which followed." Windsor and Roberts, p. 64.
78. "During the whole Soviet-Czechoslovak crisis, the western chancelleries, NATO and the American government acted with the most extreme caution. Clearly they did not wish to furnish the shadow of a suggestion that they were influencing the crisis in any way or taking part in it. The Bonn government even changed the location of manoeuvres which were to take place near the Czech border. The main preoccupation of the NATO countries in the summer of 1968 was plainly to do everything possible to prevent the occupation of Czechoslovakia--which meant doing nothing." Tigrid, p. 61.
79. The New York Times, 24 July 1968, p. 1, and 26 July 1968, p. 12, and Wolfe, p. 390.
80. Harlan Cleveland, "NATO After the Invasion," Foreign Affairs, January 1969, p. 157.
81. Ibid., p. 158.

"One of the pathetic attempts was the supposed discovery of a major arms cache near the West German border, in an area where Soviet and East

German troops had recently been stationed (during the "communications exercise"). The arms were of US manufacture and the cache also contained a secret American manual on subversion. Announcement of the discovery was made in Pravda, well before the Czechoslovak announcement, and the latter's response made it clear that they considered it a Soviet plant. Schwartz, p. 185.

Josef Smrkovsky's comments on this episode show its absurdity: "Everyone knew very well, and our security units had been warned in advance, that this was a provocation. And it was actually a provocation. At that time our scientific institutes immediately analyzed those weapons and the vaseline that had been used, and with which they were greased. They had even forgotten the mountain-type knapsacks in which the weapons had been carried. There are photographs of the knapsacks with the word 'nomer' precisely as it appeared [nomer is number in Russian]. A careful investigation was immediately carried out. Its unquestionable conclusion was that it was a provocation." Petr, 12 March 1975, p. 43.

82. James, p. 77.

83. Szulc, p. 363.

84. Ibid., p. 366.

85. James, p. 83.

86. Wilhelm Meyer-Detring, "Red Army at the Bavarian Border," Military Review, May 1969, p. 80.

87. Cleveland, p. 253-254.

88. J. A. von Kielmansegg, "Warnings Must Be Heeded," Military Review, May 1969, p. 25-26.

89. "On 2 August, General Lyman L. Lemnitzer requested a political assessment of the situation from the NATO Permanent Council. The Political Committee of the Permanent Council judged on 7 August that there were no indications of any aggression by the Warsaw Pact against West Europe, nor could it conclude that the initial Soviet assembly veiled an attack on central Europe. On 19 August, SHAPE again confirmed this view. Neither the Military Committee nor the Permanent Council considered it necessary to institute any special preparations." Meyer-Detring, p. 81.

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